Caffeine in the diet

Food & Diet, Coffee

Caffeine in the diet Email this page to a friend Bookmark & Share Printer-friendly version Caffeine is a substance that is found in certain plants. It can also be man-made (produced synthetically) and then added to food products. It is a central nervous system stimulant and a diuretic (substance that helps rid your body of fluids). Function Caffeine is absorbed and passes quickly into the brain. It does not collect in the bloodstream or get stored in the body. It leaves the body in the urine many hours after it has been consumed. There is no nutritional need for caffeine. It can be avoided in the diet. Caffeine stimulates, or excites, the brain and nervous system. It will not reduce the effects of alcohol, although many people still believe a cup of coffee will help a person " sober-up." Caffeine may be used for the short-term relief of fatigue or drowsiness. Food Sources Caffeine is widely consumed. It is found naturally in the leaves, seeds, and fruits of more than 60 plants, including: -Tea leaves -Kola nuts -Coffee -Cocoa beans It is in: -Coffee -Tea -Chocolate -Most colas (unless they are labeled " caffeine-free") Caffeine is often added to over-the-counter medications such as pain relievers, over-the-counter diet pills, and cold medicines. Caffeine has no flavor and it can be removed from a food by a chemical process called decaffeination. Side Effects Caffeine can lead to: -A fast heart rate -Anxiety -Depression -Difficulty sleeping -Nausea -Restlessness -Tremors -Urinating more often -Vomiting Stopping caffeine abruptly may cause withdrawal symptoms, such as: -Drowsiness -Headaches -Irritability -Nausea -Vomiting Reduce caffeine gradually to prevent any symptoms of withdrawal. The effect of caffeine on health has been widely studied. -Large amounts of caffeine may decrease bone mass density, most likely by interfering with the body's ability to absorb calcium. This may lead

to osteoporosis. -Caffeine may cause or worsen painful, lumpy breasts (fibrocystic disease). Caffeine may have a negative effect on a child's nutrition if caffeinated drinks replace healthy drinks, such as milk. A child who consumes caffeine may also eat less, because caffeine reduces the appetite. Recommendations The American Medical Association Council on Scientific Affairs states that moderate tea or coffee drinking likely has no negative effect on health, as long as you live an otherwise healthy lifestyle. -Three 8 oz. cups of coffee (about 250 milligrams of caffeine) per day and 5 servings of caffeinated soft drinks or tea is considered an average or moderate amount of caffeine. -Ten 8 oz. cups of coffee per day is considered excessive intake of caffeine. People who may want to avoid caffeine or only drink small amounts of it include: -People who are prone to stress, anxiety, or sleep problems -Women with painful, lumpy breasts -People with acid reflux or stomach ulcers -People with high blood pressure that does not respond to treatment -People who have problems with fast or irregular heart rhythms -People who have chronic headaches Carefully watch how much caffeine a child gets. Even though caffeine is safe in moderate amounts, it is a stimulant. A hyperactive child may need to avoid caffeine. Small amounts of caffeine during pregnancy are safe, but large amounts are strongly discouraged. -Caffeine, like alcohol, travels through your bloodstream to the placenta and can have a negative affect on your baby. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it increases your heart rate and metabolism -- both of which directly affect the baby. -It is okay to have one or two cups of coffee, tea, or cola a week, but try to give them up completely if you can. Many drugs will interact with caffeine. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about

possible interactions with caffeine whenever you take medications. Caffeine is a drug that is naturally produced in the leaves and seeds of many plants. It's also produced artificially and added to certain foods. Caffeine is defined as a drug because it stimulates the central nervous system, causing increased alertness. Caffeine gives most people a temporary energy boost and elevates mood. Caffeine is in tea, coffee, chocolate, many soft drinks, and pain relievers and other over-the-counter medications. In its natural form, caffeine tastes very bitter. But most caffeinated drinks have gone through enough processing to camouflage the bitter taste. Teens usually get most of their caffeine from soft drinks and energy drinks. (In addition to caffeine, these also can have added sugar and artificial flavors.) Caffeine is not stored in the body, but you may feel its effects for up to 6 hours. Many people feel that caffeine increases their mental alertness. Higher doses of caffeine can cause anxiety, dizziness, headaches, and the jitters. Caffeine can also interfere with normal sleep. Caffeine sensitivity (the amount of caffeine that will produce an effect in someone) varies from person to person. On average, the smaller the person, the less caffeine needed to produce side effects. Caffeine sensitivity is most affected by the amount of caffeine a person has daily. People who regularly take in a lot of caffeine soon develop less sensitivity to it. This means they may need more caffeine to achieve the same effects. Caffeine is a diuretic, meaning it causes a person to urinate (pee) more. It's not clear whether this causes dehydration or not. To be safe, it's probably a good idea to stay away from too much caffeine in hot weather, during long workouts, or in other situations where you might sweat a lot. Caffeine may also cause the body to lose calcium, and

that can lead to bone loss over time. Drinking caffeine-containing soft drinks and coffee instead of milk can have an even greater impact on bone density and the risk of developing osteoporosis. Caffeine can aggravate certain heart problems. It may also interact with some medications or supplements. If you are stressed or anxious, caffeine can make these feelings worse. Although caffeine is sometimes used to treat migraine headaches, it can make headaches worse for some people. Moderation Is the Key Caffeine is usually thought to be safe in moderate amounts. Experts consider 200-300 mg of caffeine a day to be a moderate amount for adults. But consuming as little as 100 mg of caffeine a day can lead a person to become " dependent" on caffeine. This means that someone may develop withdrawal symptoms (like tiredness, irritability, and headaches) if he or she quits caffeine suddenly. Teens should try to limit caffeine consumption to no more than 100 mg of caffeine daily, and kids should get even less. The following chart includes common caffeinated products and the amounts of caffeine they contain: http://kidshealth. org/teen/food_fitness/nutrition/caffeine. html# Cutting Back If you're taking in too much caffeine, you may want to cut back. The best way is to cut back slowly. Otherwise you could get headaches and feel tired, irritable, or just plain lousy. Try cutting your intake by replacing caffeinated sodas and coffee with noncaffeinated drinks. Options include water, decaffeinated coffee, caffeine-free sodas, and caffeine-free teas. Start by keeping track of how many caffeinated drinks you have each day, then substitute one of these daily drinks with a caffeine-free alternative. Continue this for a week. Then, if you are still drinking too much caffeine, substitute another of your daily drinks, again, keeping it up for a week. Do this for as

many weeks as it takes to bring your daily caffeine intake below the 100-milligram mark. Taking a gradual approach like this can help you wean yourself from caffeine without unwanted side effects like headaches. As you cut back on the amount of caffeine you consume, you may find yourself feeling tired. Your best bet is to hit the sack, not the sodas: It's just your body's way of telling you it needs more rest. Your energy levels will return to normal in a few days.